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Fulbright Talks Sense

It is refreshing after all the hasty, ill-considered, shotgun statements by politicians following the summit blow-up to hear from a responsible man, Sen. J. William Fulbright, who waited to speak until a serious, closed-door investigation had been made.

The Senator, therefore, knows what he is talking about. He was not rushing hotly into print to take advantage of the headlines. Of course, Sen. Fulbright isn't a candidate for president, either, although an outstanding Democrat. That helps him keep a cool head.

Following the investigation, Fulbright has flatly told his colleagues that Eisenhower's judgment in accepting personal responsibility for the U2 flight is subject to criticism—but there is no excuse for any assault on the Central Intelligence Agency.

This heads a lot of irresponsible headline seekers off at the pass. There have always been people in Congress, including the late Sen. Joseph McCarthy, who were eager to investigate the CIA. The very fact that this agency is top secret would guarantee exciting news and headlines to anyone who broke the secrecy barrier. That's the temptation.

The trouble is, of course, that, as U2 demonstrates, the CIA is probably our most vital single weapon in the kind of Cold War Russia has forced upon us—and this kind of work must be protected by absolute secrecy. Identification of CIA people should not destroy their usefulness. Revealing CIA methods would do the same.

It suffices to say that this agency has mapped the Soviet Union and Red China, quietly and secretly, and that it has infiltrated the Communist parties in virtually every nation on earth—along with who knows what other accomplishments that are still classified in secrecy and the more successful because of it.

A political investigation in an election year could dismantle our key Cold War operation.

Fulbright has performed a sober, responsible, patriotic duty in stepping up to bat and saying in plain English the CIA out of the political controversy.

He also says he was wrong to accept responsibility for the U2 flight, and we disagree with that statement. It would have looked like a humbling and ineffective fool had he admitted his knowledge of it alongside of Arthur Schlesinger who claimed responsibility for it and ordered it shot down.

But that kind of admission is proper and acceptable.

The CIA could not live and do its job in the same sort of political climate. Harry Truman protected it (and Dulles) when he was in office, and Democrats would do well to protect these first principles. Fulbright has done so.